ALASKA'S SEA MONSTER

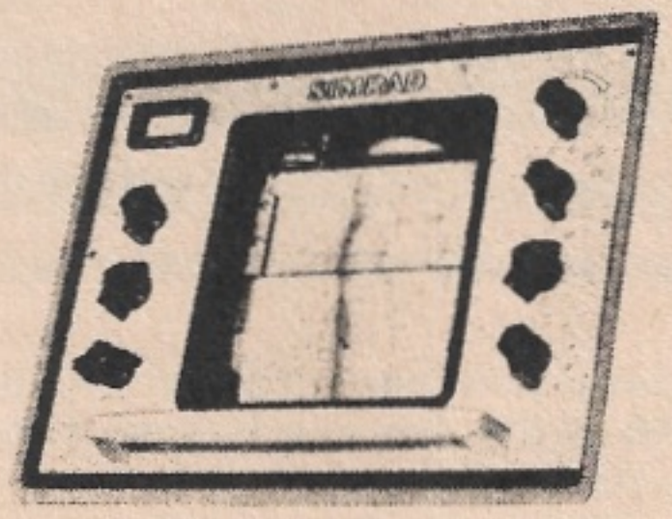
by Ivan Sanderson, July 1970.

Recorded by sonar off the southern coast of Alaska, this echogram constitutes the world's first concrete proof of the existence of a mammoth "marine long-neck."

ON APRIL 15, 1969, the M. V. *Mylark*, a sixty-five foot fishing vessel out of Kodiak, Alaska, was dragging for shrimp off Raspberry Island in the Shelikof Strait. The *Mylark* was equipped with a very sensitive sonar detection device called Simrad, a Norwegian invention used by commercial fishing fleets to locate schools of marine life. By emitting high-frequency sonic bursts, Simrad registers all sub-surface profiles on a continuous roll of five-inch graph paper.

Though the *Mylark* expected to encounter nothing of interest in this particular area, her Simrad was left operating as standard procedure. Imagine the sonar operator's surprise when the machine suddenly presented him with a clear silhouette of an enormous "creature," between 150 and 180 feet long, with two pairs of flippers, an extended, tapering tail and a long, slender neck capped by a rather snub-nosed head!

I first heard of this incident through an old friend, Captain Stanley Lee, of Alaska, who mailed me a clipping from the Kodiak *Mirror*, dated April 30, 1969. The newspaper account was fairly informative, though peppered with the usual tongue-in-cheek aspersions the press feels obliged to cast over any story which smacks of "sea monsters." Intrigued, I



Simrad is the sophisticated sonar detection device which "saw" the mammoth sea creature and recorded it in the echogram.

requested further details, and in a short time was in possession of extensive information as well as the original strip of paper from the *Mylark's* Simrad.

Satisfied that the silhouette appearing on the graph paper was indeed that of the creature described above, all we had to do to "prove" its existence was to verify the accuracy of the recording instrument—Simrad—and to certify that the paper strip had not been doctored.

Simrad's American subsidiary is a firm called Supervisors, Incorporated, of Kew Gardens, New York. This outfit supplied us with exhaustive printed matter relating to their detection devices, and this, combined with our own research, indicated that the Simrad is one of the most successful and widely used of all echo sounders. The model employed on the M. V. *Mylark* is one designated by the manufacturer as EH2A. A profile recorded by this instrument, then, is far more accurate and reliable than anything captured by the lens of a camera.

To make certain that Simrad had actually "seen" this creature, we then sent the original paper strip to Supervisors, Incorporated for their evaluation, confident that the manufacturers of Simrad would easily be able to judge a product of one of their devices as either authentic or phony. Here, in part, is their evaluation:

"You certainly got hold of a very exciting echogram there, but I am afraid that I will have to disappoint you as to the credibility of what you see on it. It has a couple of defects which make its genuineness questionable.

"... This recorder has paper speeds of 10-, 5- and 2.5-mm per minute. Using the most optimistic of these figures, 10-mm/min., the *Mylark* would have used five minutes to pass over the object. If the object is 200 feet long, as claimed, this means that the vessel drifted over it at a speed of approximately 0.5 miles per hour. Not at all impossible, but unlikely. ... The vertical scale is sixty-five fathoms (390 feet) across the full width of the paper. Therefore, the vertical dimensions of the body could make sense: approximately fifteen feet across the widest part and three to four feet across the neck.

"To be able to give an exact statement on the length of the object, I would have to know (1) the speed of the vessel, and (2) the paper speed used when the vessel passed over it, but it is hardly worth going after it because I am pretty sure that the recorder had some help from a member of the crew with some artistic abilities.

"If you study the bottom profile and the noise pattern

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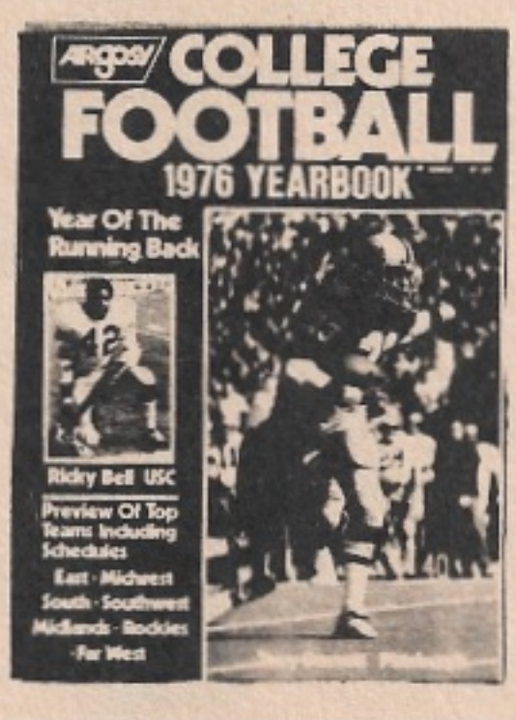

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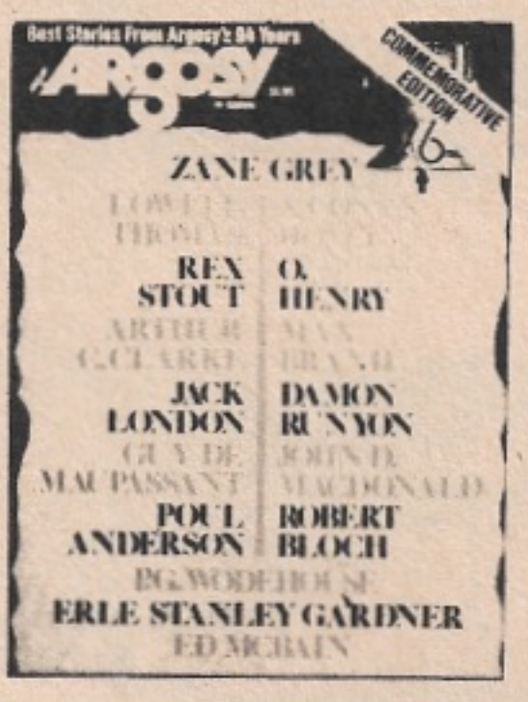

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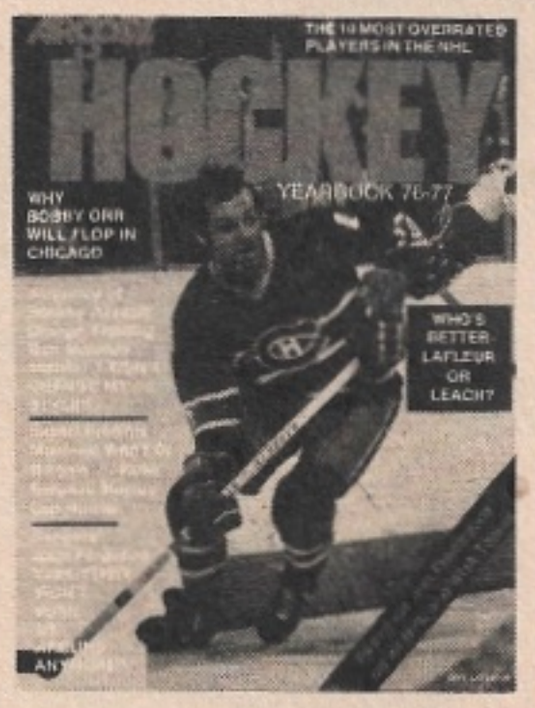
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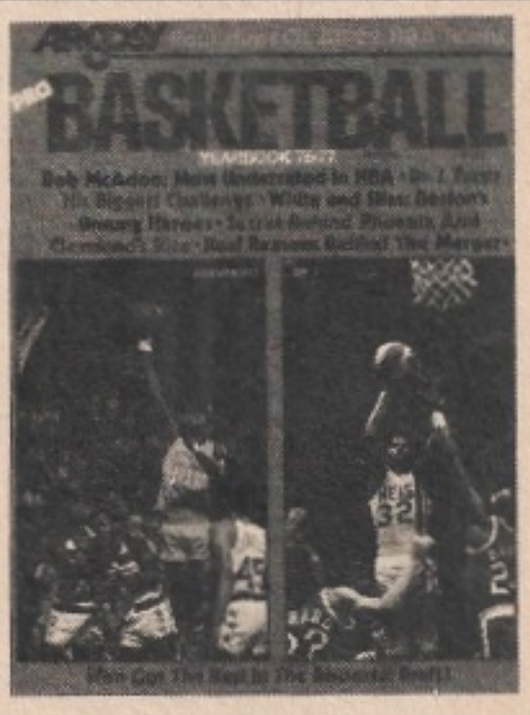

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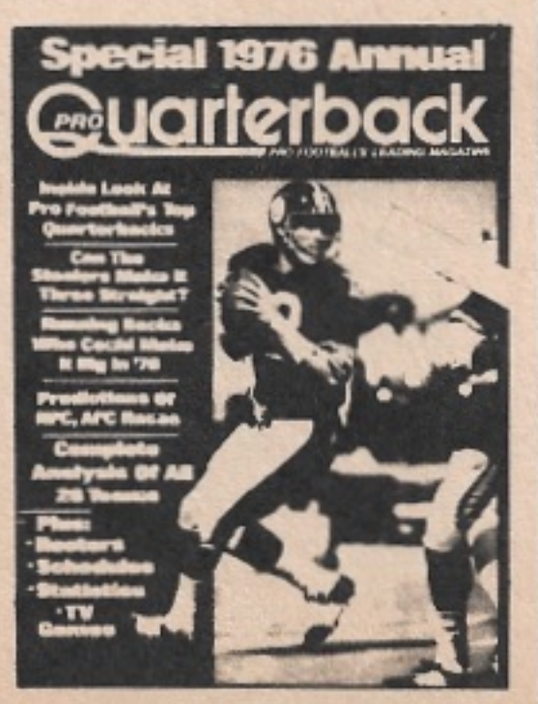
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under the bottom line, you will see that the recording is made up from vertical lines: this is because the recording pen travels in straight lines across the paper. Then study the marks that form the object and you will see that hardly any of them are vertical. . . .

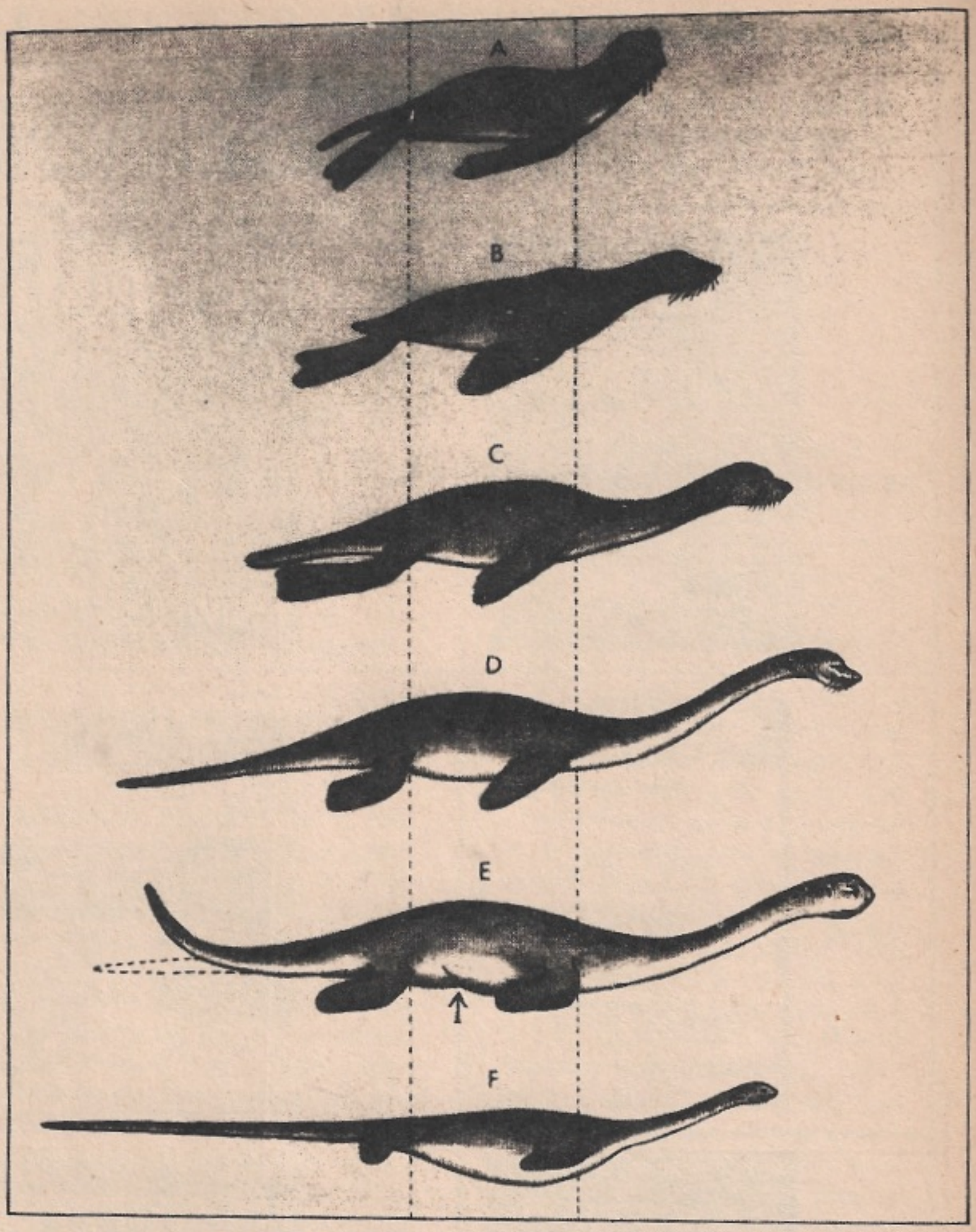
"So, as I said before, I believe the echo sounder has had some help in this case."

Frankly, we were very dumbfounded—not because the manufacturers were denying the authenticity of the echogram, but because the objections they raised were entirely unreasonable.

First, they say the *Mylark* had to be traveling just 0.5 mph, and that this is unlikely. The skipper reports that generally the ship was making two to three knots (2.30 to 3.45 mph), pulling a shrimp trawl behind, but at the time in question, they were swinging about to avoid shallow water ahead. Under those circumstances, the *Mylark* could well have been even at a virtual standstill when the echogram was recorded.

Second, their allegation that the creature silhouette is counterfeit sounds absurd, judging from the arguments they present. They say that objects appearing on the graph should be made up of vertical lines, and that most of the lines making up the creature's silhouette are not vertical. In fact, a study of other echograms sent us by Supervisors, Incorporated reveals countless nonvertical lines; in their own literature, they state that "at slow speed [of the vessel] the lines shorten and curve. . . . The reason is that the number of echoes from a single fish varies at different speeds."

Finally, since the recording of the creature's presence was immediately reported to the wheelhouse and the skipper (the paper strip was still in the Simrad), the sonar operator would have had to doctor the strip as it issued from the machine. Echogram lines are comprised of a



Author's illustration above shows proportionate shapes (not sizes) of certain marine creatures. Figure A is a Northern sea bear or fur seal. B shows a Steller's sea lion. C is a creature often reported seen in shallow, clear water off the Shetland Islands. D is a composite of many longnecks sighted in the past. E shows our Alaskan longneck as recorded by sonar. Note distinct indication of the end of its diaphragm (small arrow), a feature never before reported and which further supports the credibility of this sighting. Figure F shows how the famous Professor Oudemans envisioned this creature back in 1897.

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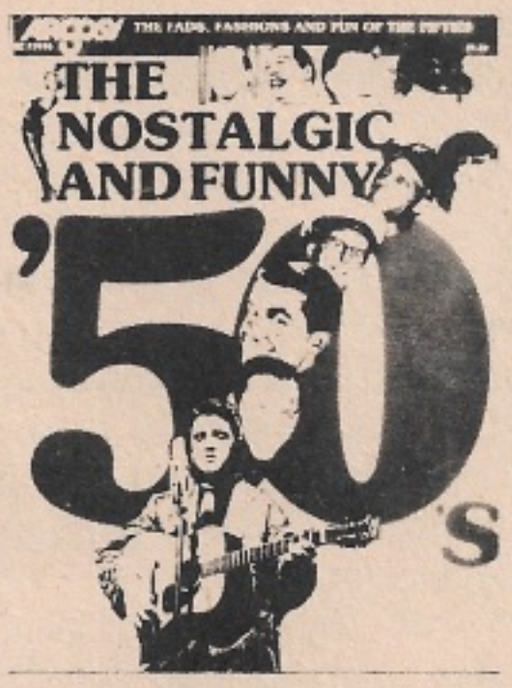

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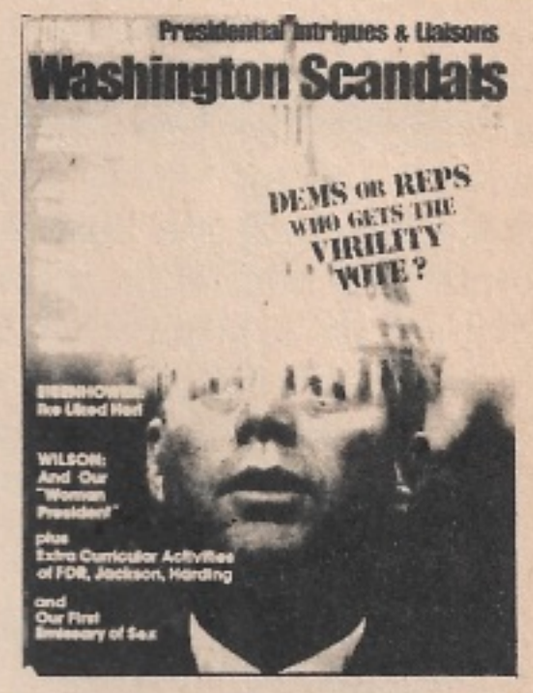
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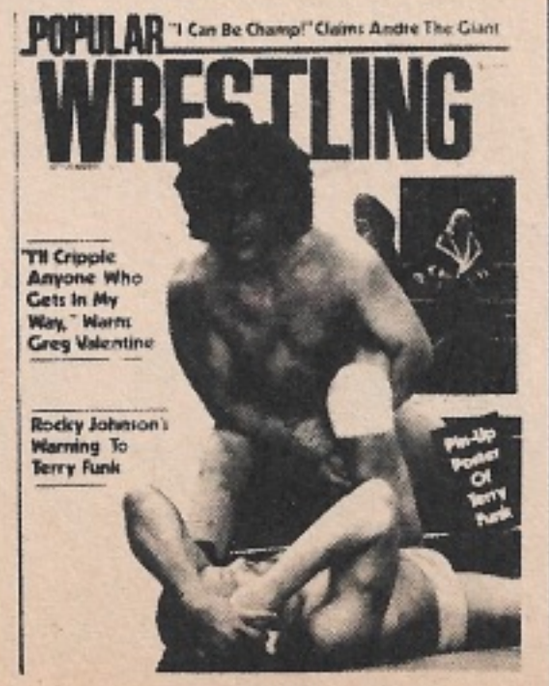
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myriad of microscopic dots, somewhat like the dots which make up a newspaper photograph. To alter this strip, the operator would have had to eliminate, under magnification, the dots already existing on the strip, then work in new lines of dots to form the silhouette of the creature, which would have further necessitated the rearrangement of all the other countless lines of dots, repitching them to conform around the creature's profile. So far, no expert can tell us how it is possible to remove a single dot from this treated paper unnoticeably; the seaman watching the Simrad at the time in question was not an expert engraver, did not possess the equipment necessary to alter the machine's product and did not, in fact, even know how the sonar device worked. But even had he been well qualified and fully equipped to perform such a job of counterfeiting, to accomplish the feat in less than ten minutes would be nothing short of a miracle.

To our satisfaction, we are certain that this strip was not tampered with—and we now have the opinions of fourteen experts, both naval and civilian (attorneys, geographers, oceanologists, biologists and others) to back us up. Therefore, unless somebody comes up with a darned sight more accurate and provable evidence to the contrary, we now possess, with his echogram, the first concrete proof of the existence of a genuine marine longneck.

Sightings of sea monsters and sea serpents have, of course, been reported throughout history. When the principles of scientific inquiry were laid down in the eighteenth century, the whole subject was dismissed as fantastic nonsense. Still, the reports have persisted, with sightings that are occasionally claimed by such impressive personages as Sir Arthur Rostron, Commodore of the Cunard Line.

Huge beasts have been allegedly sighted in bodies of fresh water as well, in lakes across Canada, Scotland, Ireland, Scandinavia, Russia and Siberia, the most famous being the so-called Loch Ness Monster, to which science gave the biggest horse laugh of all until an aeronautical engineer named Tim Dinsdale got the last laugh. Dinsdale shot a film of one of the Loch Ness Monsters sailing along at about ten knots and leaving a bow wave but no prop wash. This film was analyzed by the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre of the British Royal Air Force, and was pronounced by them to be of a genuine animal, with twelve to sixteen feet of its middle back protruding about three feet from the water.

Once this report was issued, all argument about the existence of such creatures in northern lakes naturally came to an end. The debate then settled around deciding what kind of animal they are. An extraordinary number of divergent suggestions have been advanced, including giant birds, salamanders, snails, worms, etc., and none of these guesses are as mad as they sound, since almost anything is possible in the world of nature.

Among the scientists speculating about these creatures, a few stand out. The first is Professor A. C. Oudemans, Director of the Royal Zoological and Botanical Society at The Hague, who, in 1892, published a book entitled "The Great Sea Serpent." In this, he dealt with 187 cases of reported sea monsters, and he came to the conclusion that such things did exist, and that they were most probably large seals (more of the sea-lion type), with long necks, small heads and long tails.

The second name that should take its place in this field is that of the late German paleontologist Willy Ley, who was really the first to come out in formal agreement with men such as Oudemans and British Commander Rupert T. Gould, that such beasts *do* exist.

In the realm of *marine* creatures, the most important name is Dr. Bernard Heuvelmans of Belgium, who spent ten years studying reports of such animals, which he finally published in a monumental book entitled," "In the Wake of Sea Serpent" (1968).

After Oudemans, those enthusiasts who devoted their research primarily to the marine monsters became increasingly convinced that they were dealing with more than one type of animal. Heuvelmans decided to split up the reports into seven categories, giving each a distinctive name. One type, the Draki of the Norse, looks for all the world like old Professor Oudemans' giant seal, albeit with prominent eyelashes and other hairy excrescences somewhat exaggerated. (Note: Only mammals have eyelashes.) And this creature is almost identical with the one recorded by the Simrad on board the M. V. *Mylark.*

Why do the manufacturers of Simrad seem bent upon discrediting our Alaskan longneck echogram? Perhaps they are simply trying to protect the "good name" of their product; after all, since science says that sea monsters do not exist, scientists might accuse the instrument that detects one of being faulty.

Well, I for one am convinced that (1) Simrad is not faulty (2) the echogram is perfectly authentic and (3) somewhere in the icy waters off the southern coast of Alaska there's at least one monstrous marine longneck swimming around—and who knows how many more?

SEA STORIES